

# film news

INCORPORATING DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

JANUARY 1946

ONE SHILLING



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# CONFIDENCE

There is considerable alarm and despondency in the documentary world. Jittery sponsors, centralization of all Government film production in Crown, are rumoured to be bringing about the end of documentary as we have known it.

We believe that much of this is unreal. Crises are nothing new in our industry. Pub-talk often magnifies them into disasters. But good and worthwhile documentary films will continue to be made, and we at DATA are determined to be among those who make them.

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# DOCUMENTARY *film news*

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## CATS OUT OF BAGS

Q. When is a crisis not a crisis?

A. When it's a rank crisis.

Several months ago a tax was introduced which is likely to reduce enormously the showing in Britain of American films and it was assumed that British production would be greatly increased to fill the gap.

At the time of writing one member in five of the Association of Cine-technicians is unemployed and Mr Rank is being heavily criticized by the financial pundits for a production-distribution deal alleged to resemble a pig sold in a poke. Meanwhile our exhibitors are grovelling about on their well-worn knees praying alternately to the Board of Trade and to the American industry for some guarantee that they shall not be asked to bear, in the shape of a reduction of receipts, any part of the British post-war economic burden.

To cap everything, the Rank Organization and Sir Alexander Korda claim that their established and leisurely production policies are sacrosanct and that chaos would follow any attempt to interfere with them.

Fortunately and most properly the Board of Trade is not deceived. Mr Harold Wilson has announced the formation of the National Joint Films Production Council 'to keep under review by the Industry and the Government the measures being taken to promote the fullest and best use of available film production resources'.

It is vital that the present spate of recriminations should be brought to an end at the earliest possible moment. An analysis of the situation appears to us to reveal the following key points.

(1) The tax on foreign films represents the greatest incentive the British film production industry has ever had.

(2) It may also represent a temporary threat to the revenue of exhibitors.

(3) The stability of the Rank Empire depends primarily on Rank as exhibitor and only secondarily on Rank as producer.

(4) Rank has made the fundamental mistake of allowing his interests as an exhibitor to remain dependent on a continuing supply of American films.

(5) As a result of this mistake and his policy of making a few lavish prestige films instead of more medium cost pictures which would both satisfy the exhibitors' needs and recover their costs with the home market, most British producers have been caught bunting.

(6) The tax is therefore turning out to provide less of an incentive than was expected. In the circumstances, the appearance of the White Paper on the new Films Act may be handy, but it hardly touches the seat of the present crisis.

(7) The Government has still to decide between (a) withdrawing the tax and thereby virtually handing back control of the British industry, together with a substantial annual tribute of dollars, to the Americans or (b) taking an active part in the rationalization in the national interest of the British industry.

## NOTES OF THE MONTH

## Happy New Year

WITH 1948 DNL gives place to DFN—Documentary News Letter, reaching a wider readership and being a firmly established magazine, becomes Documentary Film News. Clothing coupons may be scarce but we've managed a new dress and we hope you like it! It was designed for us by James Boswell, now Art Editor of *Lilliput*. Some of our original readers may remember the time when we came out monthly; wartime difficulties made publication irregular but, with the New Year and a new volume we turn over a new leaf and announce monthly appearance in the future. A word to old subscribers—we need new readers and plenty of them; you'll find a form inside this issue—do please help us by getting it filled in by a new subscriber; or how about giving a present of a subscription to a friend overseas? Don't forget we go post free anywhere in the world. To all our readers—the Correspondence pages have not been over-full lately. Let's have your views and criticism on anything and everything in short letters, we are getting tired of the sound of our own voices!

## The New Bill

THE BILL containing the proposals for the new Cinematograph Films Act, which is to take the place of the 1938 Act, comes to hand just as we are going to press. There is, therefore, no opportunity to do more than provide a brief summary of its main proposals, and to attempt a somewhat hasty assessment of their significance. The most important proposal from the point of view of the documentary and shorts business is that, at long last, and after many years of unremitting campaigning, a genuine cost clause is to be applied. The figure is 10 shillings per foot (labour costs), applying to all films, both long and short, if they are to qualify for exhibitor's quota. While many of the documentary and shorts people would have liked a higher minimum, the figure proposed may nevertheless be regarded as satisfactory, since it will eliminate the quickie which has been the bugbear of the industry for so long. Moreover, the new Bill also abolishes the separate quotas for short and long films, and substitutes in their place separate quotas for first features and for all other films in the programme, with the exception of newsreels, etc., which remain exempt, as previously. The distinction between the first feature and the rest of the programme, as far as quota is concerned, is that the former will be calculated "on the number of days of exhibition of a particular film" and the latter on footage. Renter's quota is abolished altogether. The regulations on exhibitor's quota are, on the other hand, considerably tightened; particularly welcome is the clause which lays down that 'Any British Film' (that is, long or short) 'must be shown at least once between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. if it is to be counted for quota purposes'. This removes any possibility of the revival of the once popular practice of bumping off British product by showing it only in the mornings. A further clause penalizes the big circuits, and concedes to the small exhibitor; the small man whose theatre takings are less than £100 per week is 'relieved of all quota obligations', but groups of more than 200 theatres controlled by the same person (as it might be Mr J. A. Rank) will be designated as 'special quota theatres' and will be liable to higher quota rates. More than this, the Board of Trade will have discretion not to license any further theatres to the big circuits, a clause which recalls the famous gentlemen's agreement between Rank and Dalton some years back. Going further still, the Bill proposes that the big circuits shall also be compelled to show up to six British films a year certified as suitable by a Selection Board appointed by the Board of Trade; this presumably will be the body set up by Cripps, whose functions hitherto have been highly obscure. The result of this proposal should be that films which the Trade is reluctant to handle because of their unusual or experimental character will be given a chance to prove their worth (or otherwise) in at least some of the major theatres of the country. A rather sinister clause lays

it down that the provisions of the Bill may be applied to 16 mm films; but this is, fortunately qualified by the statement that this can only be done 'subject to affirmative resolutions of both Houses of Parliament'. One of the most gratifying provisions of the Bill refers to the Films Council. Ever since its formation, and subsequent transformations, there have been many justified complaints that it did not adequately represent the balance of power as between the financial, creative, technical and consumer interests of the Trade. Its new composition puts this right; there are to be five independent representatives of the public (of whom one must be Chairman), four representatives of the producers, four of labour, four of exhibitors and a modest two for the renters. The general impression from a hasty reading of the Bill is that the role of the Council is also to be considerably strengthened *vis à vis* Board of Trade policies and action. A particularly important point from the documentary point of view is that the definition of what constitutes a British film for the purposes of quota has been extended to include films 'made by or on behalf of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, or by or on behalf of the Government of any other part of His Majesty's Dominions'. This removes the anomalous situation by which many productions, including some of the best Canadian films, were ruled out as ineligible for quota. The actual quota percentages are not yet stated in the bill; which is hardly surprising in view of the situation regarding the Import Tax. But the Board of Trade is to be committed to fixing these percentages not later than July 1st, 1948. We shall comment in greater detail on the new proposals in our next issue, when there will also be an opportunity to study the reactions of the various sectional interests of the Trade.

## The Scientific Film Association

THE SFA has been very busy this last few months—one conference on *The Use of Films in Universities* was held in London (in conjunction with the Cambridge Films Council and the BFI) while only a week later there was one on *The Visual Unit in Education* held in Manchester. Both of them were very well attended and an impression of the latter is included elsewhere in this issue. The SFA is doing a most valuable work in the education field in support of the national committees.

## Films in the Colonies

ON JANUARY 16th the British Film Institute is to hold a conference on the Use of Film in the Colonies at the Royal Empire Society Hall. Creech Jones (Colonial Secretary) is to open the conference and Adrian Crowley (Under Secretary of State for the Colonies) will be in the chair. John Grierson is expected to speak in his capacity as Director of Mass Media for UNESCO.

## Sequence

A MAGAZINE by this name is being published by the Oxford University Film Society. Number Two has just come our way and been thoroughly enjoyed by the Board. The standard of writing is high and the production is excellent. The good quality paper and interesting stills alone make it worth two shillings a go.

## Film Today

PUBLISHED by the Saturn Press with an Editorial Board comprising Sydney Box, John Cross, Paul Rotha, Carol Reid and Richard Winterton, the first number of a new film publication 'Film Today' (5s.) has just appeared. Lavishly illustrated, it attempts in the words of the editorial 'to cover all those departments of the cinema with which we believe our audience to be concerned'. Subjects range from Unesco to cleavage, the making of a film to poster publicity and overseas film activities.

## Films in Germany by ARTHUR ELTON

Film Adviser to Information Services Control of Germany

(A broadcast talk delivered over the British Forces Network of Germany on October 21st, 1947)

THE FILM Section of ISC, or Information Services Control to give it its full name, deals mainly with two kinds of film—those imported from other countries, in our case generally from Britain, and those made by the German film industry for use in Germany, and presently I hope, for export. I am going to consider the import of films into Germany first, not because this is necessarily the most important job being done, but because the Film Section of ISC has just brought this part of its work to a conclusion. Since October 3rd the import and distribution of films from Britain and America has been handed over to commercial interests. From now on they must undertake the very great responsibility of selecting films for Germany. For films are no ordinary commodities. They are the products of creative imagination. Many films, perhaps most films, are pretty poor and shabby works of art, but this does not mean that they do not influence the ways of thinking and feeling of millions of people. For the masses of people of the world learn about themselves and their neighbours through films, learn to despise or admire other countries, learn to buy their goods and judge their ways of life. The world looks at America and Britain through the eyes of Hollywood and Denham. That is one of the reasons why no controlling authority in Germany dare allow films to be used irresponsibly, for they can be instruments of good or harm.

The very power of films is sometimes a bit of an embarrassment to the people who make a living by producing or selling them. For a long time the film industry worked by a formula which ran something like this: the public is always right; therefore the films the greatest number of people pay to see are the best films. QED. On this piece of phoney opportunist idealism, the film moguls in the past justified drenching all mankind in emotional film slush. Then Goebbels got busy. Stealing an idea here, corrupting an argument there, he mobilized the power of the cinema, not only for profit or the satisfaction of mucky sentiment, but to poison the mind of a whole people. And the film boys outside Germany who for years had been pretending that all they were doing was to 'sell' entertainment—something, they said, as innocent as putting on pantomimes—were suddenly seen to be babies playing with spiritual atom bombs. For the awful truth is that a film may make money because it endorses standards of behaviour or presents ideas which people would be ashamed to adopt if they hadn't 'seen them on the pictures'. And which of us today won't pay a few pennies to have our lower natures not only catered for but positively congratulated? The question which faces us all is: Can the film trade find itself new standards in keeping with the age we live in? And nowhere in the world today is the problem more urgent than Germany.

To illustrate my argument, let me quote one of the greatest box-office hits in Germany—the British film *The Wicked Lady*, put out a year or so ago. I fancy so many German people paid to see it because, by implication, they could argue from it that we won the war because many of us

are naturally sadistic, sexy, unscrupulous swash-bucklers, and not because we had the courage of our convictions. Were the millions of reichmarks that film earned really worth the harm it did? This is the sort of question which must not only be asked but answered by those handling films in Germany today.

Now let me consider the other kind of film—the films made by the German film industry. Now that Film Section has handed over the distribution of British films in Germany. I believe that it will find itself faced with by far the most important task of its existence—the encouragement of a new, lively and independent German industry. For films—no matter how base the motives behind their production—are one of the ways a nation expresses itself and takes stock of itself. For the masses of the people film-makers occupy the place the ballad-singers and storytellers used to occupy. Though films from abroad can amuse and instruct, can teach and encourage I think no country can acquire a philosophy ready-made from another; each country must hammer out its own. The film can play a huge part in this process. That is why I believe it is even more important to encourage an independent home industry in Germany than to ensure the import of appropriate films from outside.

If my arguments are right, the new German films are likely both to illustrate trends in German thought and feelings today, and to be a powerful factor in shaping the Germany of the future. If they can find the growing points in the new Germany and bring them alive on the screen, they will do a powerful service for the new Germany. If they merely suggest that the German people are creatures of circumstance, then they will not help the German people to find their way out of their present difficulties. If they counsel suicide and despair, they may do harm.

Let us have a look at some of the German films made since the occupation. Let's take first of all Helmuth Kautner's *In Jenen Tagen (In Those Days)*, by far the best film yet made and released in the British zone. Technically the film is of the highest order. It is imaginative; simple effects, like the reflection of trees in the wind-screen of a car, have been used brilliantly; the acting is vivid and sincere, and I shall long remember the old baroness being driven out of burning Berlin in a battered car, or the sergeant being shot as he is driving a German officer along a snowy road in mid-winter. The hero of the film, by the way, is a motor-car which tells its own story to prove that, throughout the Nazi regime and the war, there were decent ordinary people in Germany. True enough, of course, but the film lacks something all the same. It lacks a kind of toughness. For its characters, Fascism was a horrible background. None of them participated. None of them fought back. No. I'm afraid *In Jenen Tagen* falls finally into the class of films showing the German people as orphans of the storm. Then there are *Zug Vögel (Birds of Passage)* from the British zone and *Ehe im Schatten (Marriage in the Shadows)* from the Russian. Both are finely made, but both suggest, or at least imply, that the only way out of difficulty is

suicide. Both, I contend, are dangerous. On the other hand, *Morder sind unter Uns (Murderers are Among Us)* from the Russian zone avoids these dangers, and is besides a masterly piece of film-making worthy to be ranked beside any film made in Europe this year. It is the story of the successful struggle against despair and disillusionment by a prisoner from the Eastern front, who regains his pride by returning to his job of being a doctor. On the way he hands a Black Marketeer ex-Nazi thug over to the police instead of taking the law into his own hands and shooting him. But if you ask me which will be the better box-office success in Germany, I shall reply the former. Not because it is the better film, but because people will pay more readily to see something that implies that non-participation is innocence, than to see something which does not evade the realities of the present situation. A vivid example of the dangers of taking the box-office point of view when determining a film policy for Germany.

Alongside the feature films there is, of course, the equally important question of documentary films and the huge audiences outside the public cinemas. It is in this field that perhaps the greatest opportunities lie in Germany today. For of all films that suffered under the hand of Goebbels, documentary and teaching films suffered worst. At the present time mixed German and English teams are making documentaries for the public cinemas, and even more importantly, every help possible is being given to the production and distribution of films on 16 mm. In the British Zone there is an organization called Gesellschaft Unterichts für Film und Bild, with its headquarters in Hamburg. This is now at work making a series of films ranging from scientific studies of the honey-bee to plain teaching films for the schools. Other films are planned for adults and children, and presently it is hoped that every German school and adult institute will be able to look to the film both for recreation, learning and culture. A lively and instructive documentary tradition is an asset in any country, and I think that Germany with her splendid technical skill, will presently become one of the foremost countries in this respect.

Finally, of course, there is the newsreel—*Welt im Film*—which is still a directly controlled Anglo-US operation, though carried out almost entirely by German staff. *Welt im Film* goes to every cinema in the British and American Zones, and is one of the most important sources of news from home and overseas available in the country today. Presently, I hope, *Welt im Film* will become a wholly German undertaking.

Well there you have it. Germany has slender technical resources, but splendid technicians; she has a film tradition second to none in the world. Our job is to see that the films in the new Germany become an independent, healthy and flourishing movement, representative of all that is best in the German people themselves, and not merely an instrument in the hands of those whose principal aim is to get as rich as possible as quickly as possible, and then get out.

## Venezuela to *Verdoux*

A RAMBLE by EDGAR ANSTEY

'YOU'VE BEEN to New York and South America,' said the editor, 'how about an article?' It was true that much could be reported from across the Atlantic. Documentary is ubiquitous in opportunity if not in accomplishment. The world—as every new applicant for a new job will tell you—teems with subjects.

Yet what finally enabled me to embark on this article with some show of enthusiasm was a shorter and simpler expedition than the trans-Atlantic crossing. It was a trip down Charing Cross Road to Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux*. And if, as a result, I write not a word about foreign parts, I suspect that Chaplin's latest film has more to say to documentary film-makers than the jungles of the New World, whether they be of chromium or coconut palm.

Note first that *Monsieur Verdoux* is a film arousing passionate controversy. Whether or not the wit, the sentiment and the slapstick is accepted without an increase in blood pressure, you may be sure that the moral speculations of the film's climax will lead to disputation as bitter as those which have traditionally been reserved for a Cocteau premier. And the reasons are not dissimilar. For here is someone trying to use the cinema for a personal statement on matters in which we all regard ourselves as expert. Moreover he is clearly possessed by a truly passionate desire to state his case; the whole purpose and manner of the film is subordinated to the need to make a sharp criticism of society. The violence of the audience reactions is the measure of his success.

It is important that Chaplin's climax, in which he suggests that the individual who murders to defend the economic position of his family, may be no more guilty than the nation that goes to war in defence of its way of life, gets an immediate response from working-class audiences. They are pleased also by the direct assaults upon 'respectability' and upon the complacencies of religious jargon. It may not be fanciful to suggest that Chaplin is attempting something not dissimilar from the aim of Shaw's earlier plays (*Mrs Warren's Profession*, *Arms and the Man*, for example), but with the important difference that Chaplin appears to reach immediate and direct contact with a working-class audience. Perhaps we should regard Chaplin as embarking in this film on a new career as 'The Poor Man's Shaw' or Shaw without the long words. Some of the vicious middle-class and intellectually snobbish reactions to the Chaplin climax would seem very familiar to GBS. It is true that when he speculates verbally and clumsily on the nature of evil, Chaplin is merely inept, but more than compensating is the beautifully appropriate stylization of his miming (compare not unprofitably Jean Louis Barrault) which goes often deeper than cinema words have yet learned to probe. Watch also his masterly contempt for his back-cloth and the way he deliberately uses the screen clichés of train-wheels, feet running upstairs and the Eiffel Tower to accentuate his satire on the feverish daily whirl of the business-man. He rightly assumes that it is Chaplin and what Chaplin has to say that is the attraction, that the sets and the continuity devices are props to be ignored or themselves satirized.

But what has all this to do with documentary? Let us turn for an answer to the current production schedule of the Central Office of Information. Let us read the titles. Here are documentaries which undoubtedly employ, and often with great efficiency, the whole gamut of cinematic devices known to man. They embrace everything under the sun from the bottling of pickles to a coloured cartoon about satellite towns. They stand or fall, not by stars or stories, but by their ideas. Why then do the titles make curiously gloomy reading—even for the devotee of documentary.

Is it because of an inescapable conviction that these films—unlike *Monsieur Verdoux*—will have nothing new to say, nothing that anyone has passionately wanted to get across to an audience and for which the medium is a means and not an end?

Have British documentaries become dull because in spite of the crying need for them to revise and restate the social democratic philosophy their makers succeed in saying nothing which has not already been said only too often in print or over the radio—or indeed in earlier films? The number of feature productions which have anything original to say is, of course, also negligible. But they are able to maintain audience interest by their fictional content. They have a tale to tell, normally a familiar one revamped, but at any rate a tale.

Do we reach the conclusion that the documentary film-maker who is eschewing fiction must substitute personal opinion and controversy? I believe that at any rate we should re-examine the role of the individual in the production process. The world is coming slowly to accept the view that although the provision of food, clothing and shelter must be subject to mass disciplines these may well be dangerous instruments on the level of philosophical interpretation and belief. It is already clear that anti-individualist doctrines will not give us full and flexible power over any art-form. Let us not forget that in the earliest days of documentary the element of 'interpretation' was held to be essential and new interpretations do not spring from bureaucracy.

To approach the current documentary problem from this point of view reveals clearly the danger of administration becoming senior partner to production in the control of documentary policy. For official films the Department must name the informational task: the film-maker must be left free to provide the screen solution.

Recently I viewed a group of Continental documentaries most of which put our own work to shame for liveliness of purpose and treatment. Yet in the middle of one of them—a beautiful Italian film of shepherd life and a powerful piece of Italian public relations—a civil servant at my elbow in a stage whisper to her neighbour remarked, 'Not a very clean farm, is it?' Visions were immediately conjured up of the fate of this film had it passed through British official hands. One can readily imagine the deletion of all the key sequences on the grounds that the agricultural methods shown were not of the most modern order.

So we do not need to visit the tropics for a salutary piece of advice on documentary. Let us make a pilgrimage instead to the feet of the courageous Mr Chaplin who had something to say and was not turned from his purpose until he had said it. Let us not forget that in the early days of documentary film-making in this country, something not dissimilar was wont to happen. In these days it is more common to sit back and complain that no one offers any good subjects to make. No one ever did.

## DFN COMPETITION No. 1

It is the year 1588 after the defeat of the Armada. Great social, political and economic changes are taking place in Elizabethan England. The Films Division of the Queen's Privy Council has been ordered to make a series of six films to introduce these changes to the public and to bolster up the morale of the people after the war with Spain. One film each is allotted to the War Office, the Admiralty, the Board of Trade and the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Education.

We offer prizes of a guinea and half a guinea for the best selection of titles (with suggested Elizabethan script writers) for these six films.

Entries must reach the Editor before February 1st and results will appear in the March issue.

## BRITISH DOCUMENTARY

We welcome *British Documentary* which has just been established as a body representative of all those engaged in documentary film production and distribution in this country.

The broad aims of *British Documentary* are to develop:

- (1) The technical and artistic quality, and the social and cultural value of documentary films.
- (2) The freedom of expression and the moral and artistic responsibility of documentary film workers.
- (3) Proper financial conditions for the production and distribution of documentary films.
- (4) Adequate distribution for every subject which is produced.
- (5) International co-operation, by exchange of

films, workers, and ideas, and by joint productions, through the World Union of Documentary.

It is, in fact, as a result of a series of open meetings held to discuss the World Union of Documentary, set up in Brussels last June, that the new organization has come into being.

A number of immediate and practical functions for *British Documentary* have been agreed. They range from acting as the platform for documentary opinion and policy to providing a central meeting place and club-room.

Membership of *British Documentary* is open to all those working in documentary film production and distribution; there is also a category of associate membership for those who have done service to the documentary movement.

## STAR DOCUMENTARY

**The World is Rich**

made by Films of Fact  
produced by Paul Rotha

Why is a film reviewer like a Commissioner for Land Revenue? Because they both spend a lot of time making allowances, and because the same glow of satisfaction warms the hearts of both collector and critic when they find that no allowances need be made. *The World is Rich* asks no quarter and no charity. Here, for once, there is no necessity to assume excuses, lack of technical means, inexperience, sponsorial spinelessness or lack of funds. Mr Rotha was probably faced with most of these difficulties at one time or other in the course of production: but he has overcome them, and overcome them so completely that not a rack of them is left to mar his finished film. It can be judged as the major work is, by the most exacting standards of criticism. The theme is the world food situation, how it arose, and what the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations plans to do and asks the constituent nations to do—to increase the production of staple foods and ensure an equitable distribution of them to the undernourished millions of the world. It is a measure

Mr Rotha's skill of presentation that he manages to get a subject of this magnitude into a film five reels without apparent overcrowding, without resorting to windy generalizations, and without allowing his audience for a moment to forget the hungry eyes and aching bellies that lie behind the official figures. Its success in this last respect is perhaps the film's greatest achievement. The power of the cinema to translate facts and figures into flesh and blood—and all too visible bone—has seldom been fully exploited; but it has never been more fully exploited than in *The World is Rich*. Equally remarkable, in these days when to be candid about ugly facts in an official film is hardly less ill-bred than sniggering the duchess's toupet, is the uncompromising



'plenty of food everywhere, old man'

way in which this film faces the full implications of the issues which it raises. Responsibly, reasonably, with the help of such prominent personalities as Sir John Orr and the late Mr La Guardia, the case is made for the abandonment of the present economic system in so far as it affects the production and distribution of food. It is not an impartial film. It favours the defenceless, hungry, ordinary man, and is strongly opposed to all those who are permitted by a system of free enterprise to gamble with, speculate in, corner and restrict the food he needs. Controversial? Yes, but the controversy is one in which we are all involved as surely as we are involved in mankind. As Sir John Orr says in the film, if the nations cannot agree about such a fundamental subject as the abolition of hunger and want, there's nothing on God's earth they will agree about. And if *The World is Rich* is shown as widely as it

deserves to be, it will help bring agreement considerably nearer.

The film is not only impressive because of its subject matter. Again and again one is struck by the skill and meticulous care with which shots from innumerable sources have been collected and compiled. The commentary and the music, too, are on the whole admirably composed to bring out the full implications of the visuals. Yet there is something about the structure of the film which is untidy and confused. The broad thread of the argument, although never broken, is sometimes entangled in a knot of irrelevances, and sometimes doubles back on itself so that considerable concentration is required to follow it. This lack of clarity in development is not entirely due to the complexity of the subject, and has the unfortunate effect of making the audience work harder for its information than it should properly be asked to in a public cinema. The criticism might be hardly worth mentioning were it not for the fact that the Isotype diagrams on which the film relies for illustration of some of its principal points are quite inadequate to the task. They have been made without ingenuity and without much thought; and their effect is to complicate still further the already rather tortuous unfolding of the theme.

In spite of these defects, *The World is Rich* is a documentary film in the very highest class. In courage, sincerity, and importance of subject-matter it is in a different category from the ordinary run of propaganda and public relations productions, and it merits the widest possible exhibition throughout the world. Yet it is understood at the time of going to press that it will only get a very meagre theatrical distribution in this country. Whether this is due to the opposition of the renters or to some other cause, it is greatly to be deplored. A change is long overdue in a distribution system which permits second features of the most disreputable kind to exclude from the screen films of real public interest and importance. Ultimately the remedy is in the hands of audiences, who too seldom express their preferences to the cinema managers; but it is also to be hoped that the new Cinematograph Films Act will do something to improve the situation.

or is there?



Unless otherwise indicated, 'DFN' Reviews are the work of 'DFN' Reviewing Panel, consisting of Stephen Ackroyd, Donald Alexander, Max Anderson, Ken Cameron, Paul Fletcher, Sinclair Road and Grahame Tharp. Opinions expressed are the collective opinions of the Panel.

**Tale in a Teacup.** Greenpark for International Tea Market Expansion Board. *Producers*: Ralph Keene and Terry Bishop. *Script*: Laurie Lee. *Photography*: George Still. *Music composed by* Lambert Williamson, *and conducted by* John Hollingsworth. *Editor*: John Trumper. *Distribution*: T. and non-T from ITMEB. 17 mins.

**A String of Beads.** Greenpark for ITMEB. *Producers and Director*: Ralph Keene. *Script*: Laurie Lee. *Photography*: George Still. *Musical Director*: John Hollingsworth. *Original Music*: Elizabeth Lutyens. *Editor*: John Trumper. *Distribution*: T and non-T from ITMEB. 25 mins.

**'T' for Teacher.** W. M. Larkins Studio for the Tea Bureau under the Supervision of Voice and Vision Ltd. *Verse*: Roger MacDougall. *Music*: Francis Chagrin. *Animation*: Peter Sachs.

This series sponsored by the Tea Bureau comprises three films of very different type. The first sets out to tell the story of tea, its origin in China, the starting of the first plantations in Assam in 1823, its introduction into this country and growing popularity until it became a national institution. The approach is simple and direct. There is a certain amount of historical reconstruction at the beginning, which is not wholly successful. The film then proceeds to describe clearly and well the work involved from plantation to factory before the finished packet of tea is ready.

'T' for Teacher takes over at this point and adds some useful hints about how to make a good cup of tea. It is a cartoon in the Lotte Reiniger tradition, the figures being in silhouette form.

*A String of Beads*, a story documentary set in the plantations of Assam, is the centre piece of the series. It is a moving and imaginative film which successfully avoids the almost inevitable comparison with *Song of Ceylon*. It tells of the marriage of Ramdas and Mangri who work in the tea gardens, of their home and the child that is born. The film is lyrical before all else, it catches the mood of the young couple against the natural beauty of the plantations. It does not pretend to do more than this. The rhythm of the film is consistent throughout. Yet no theatrical distribution can be obtained, which confirms one's suspicions that the exhibitors and renters do not know their business.

**Downlands.** Greenpark for COI in association with Film Centre. *Direction*: Charles de Lautour and Humphrey Swinler. *Photography*: George Still. *Distribution*: CFL. 18 mins.

This is the last of The 'Pattern of Britain' series which has ranged up and down these isles and caught the many moods of the changing countryside. *Downlands* adds its impressions of rolling farmlands which have been cultivated intensively by succeeding generations. The film tends, however, to be rather flat, due probably to the series of accidents which upset and delayed production. While it has none of the memorable shots which make other of the films in this series stick in one's mind, it obviously belongs to the pattern and adds its piece to the picture of Britain.

**Park Here.** Greenpark for COI. *Producer*: Ralph Keene. *Director*: John Eldridge. *Camera*: Martin Curtis. *Distribution*: CFL. 17 mins.

**Theme.** The difficulties encountered by the townsman when he visits the country and the solution which would be afforded by the creation of National Parks.

**Comment.** This film falls into two parts, which bear little relationship to each other. In the first an actor disguised as a railwayman deserts his engine for a bicycle and gets into difficulties on an expedition into the country. This, since he does not know that hay burns, cows stray and his attractive girl friend has forgotten to pack a sandwich, is hardly surprising. The second part shows some of the beautiful unspoiled tracts of country which could be declared National Parks and provided with proper facilities for visitors.

The idea of National Parks is a good one, as the experience of Canada and the United States has shown; this film, however, will do nothing to convince you of their value in Britain, or even to explain what the idea really means.

**The Centuries Between.** Merlin Films for British Gas Council. *Producer*: M. Hankinson. *Director*: G. Gunn. *Camera*: J. Flack. *Distribution*: BGC non-T. 18 mins.

This is a film about a rural community whose small, privately owned gas works goes into liquidation, throwing the inhabitants back on more primitive methods of heating and cooking. A petition is organized and addressed to the large gas undertaking in the nearest town, and when enough potential consumers have agreed to take the supply the pipes are laid. So gas returns to the village and everybody, it is to be presumed, lives happily ever after. It is competently, but by no means brilliantly, made and carries out its not very inspiring task with fair success. But one looks in vain for a real touch of imagination in the direction or a true spark of humanity in the acting. In short, it is a film without feeling, and that is a cardinal sin.

**Scrap Book for 1922.** Pathé. *Produced by* Peter Baylis, in association with Leslie Baily. *The pages turned by* Patric Curwen. *Narration*: John Snagge. *Film Editor*: A. Milner-Gardner. *Musical Director*: Hal Evans.

The Year is 1922. Here is a film following closely the pattern set by the BBC in its popular series. Perhaps the thought of sitting for over half an hour through vintage library material, with all its speeded-up projection and grotesque fashions, might seem a little terrifying. But somehow the film is always interesting and sometimes very funny. Peter Baylis has selected his twenty-five-year-old celluloid with discretion and has assembled it with skill, and while his desire for artistic perfection might have inclined him to make rather more ruthless use of the scissors it is obvious that he has allowed one eye occasionally to wander over to the box-office. For surely *Scrapbook*, with its three thousand and something feet, is the right length for the trade—just

## NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

as far as any documentary film can be. And anyway a mighty lot appears to have happened in what at the time seemed a pretty ordinary year as years go. In between a rather cliché start and a flowery ending Mr Patric Curwen turns the pages with scarcely a rustle.

**Dover '47.** Data through COI for Ministry of Health. *Producer*: D. Alexander. *Director*: Mary Beales. *Photography*: W. Suschitzky. *Distribution*: T and non-T COI. 10 mins.

**Theme.** Dover rebuilding.

**Comment.** Here, at last, seemed to be a documentary which had managed by the lively approach of its makers to scramble out of the general rut. Starting off in parody of the typical travelogue's style in dealing with such an historic setting as the English Channel coast, and with Alice Duer Miller's 'White Cliffs of Dover' in our minds, it halted us abruptly, by a nicely-conceived gag, as it appeared about to pursue a sedate course through the tangible history of a long-established town. Switching then to a gentle probe, under the leadership of its American commentator, into Dover's immediate and future rebuilding plans, it takes us through the town to meet some of the ordinary inhabitants: and then concentrates on a new, and somewhat isolated, estate where mass-produced temporary houses are being erected. Here we discover, to the surprise of the American commentator as well (he appears in the film), that not only do the roads bear American names, and so perpetuate Dover's link with wartime visitors, but that the English commentator (who has also appeared in the film—he tried to convince us he was an ordinary Dover chap by being discovered lolling over a monument) is living in one of the temporary houses. The film ends with a 'wise-crack', which so embarrassed the American commentator that his feeble delivery of it makes one feel at any moment an all too familiar voice will roll out over the last shot of the castle ruins to say, 'And now we leave this ancient town . . .'

Why doesn't this film come up to the expectation of its more imaginative handling of its subject than is found in the common run of films? Partly because it leaves a lot of questions unanswered about the subject itself—and there is the time to answer them. Also, it misses opportunities of broadening its interest by not taking us, for instance, into the finished temporary houses to meet those people lucky enough to have one; and to learn how they got them, how they like them and how they enjoy going what appear to be some miles into the town when the buses aren't running. But more, I think, it falls down on technicalities; for, in spite of competent and often pleasant photography, uncertain direction (watch particularly the scenes of the castle gatekeeper shutting the door, the city engineer's office and the group at the end of the film) and weak casting irritate where there should be no irritation. The English commentator is far too colourless a personality beside his American colleague to give a balanced effect, especially for overseas audiences.

## NEW FILMS FROM CANADA

*Bronco Busters*. 16mm. Sound. Running Time: 15 minutes. Produced 1946 by the National Film Board in the Canada Carries On Series.

*Theme*. A break in the hard life of venturesome and unventuresome cowboys while they compete or watch (respectively) the annual Calgary Stampede (rodeo).

*Comment*. *Bronco Busters* starts as it ends, with scenes of horses roaming Alberta's foothills—here and there a cowboy having a hard life.

'The Calgary Stampede draws spectators from all across the continent to watch top-notch riders pit their skill against the strength and cunning of the four-legged outlaws.' We see the spectators at the end of the draw, so to speak, looking at the exhibition of agricultural machinery which is part of the Stampede, and settling to their seats.

The show begins: wild horse riding, calf roping, bramah bull riding, and the bulldogging, make up the main events. Final event of the big show is the chuck-wagon race. 'We see the wagons loaded with all the supplies needed by men riding the ranges, pelting along to the finish line . . . When the last event is over, back to the ranges go the ranch hands and the wild horses. *Bronco Busters* ends as it started, with scenes of horses roaming Alberta's foothills.'

And there's really very little else to say about it. Any film about animals, horses in particular, gets by, because, however static the film, the animals can be counted on to move—usually with a superb grace and beauty. Here the movement of the bulls and calves and horses (sorry, 'four-legged outlaws') may not be so graceful, but is fast and unexpected enough to create an interest in what is a pretty ordinary piece of film-making: a film which might have been made anywhere in the North American Continent. It obviously loses some visual interest from being shown in black and white when originally made in colour (owing to shortage of prints); but in black and white it merits no more than the term 'programme fill-up'.

(The quotations are from the National Film Board's information sheet.)

*Tomorrow's Citizens*. 35 mm. Black and white. Sound. Running time: 10 min. National Film Board, Canada Carries On series, 1947.

This film purports to 'examine the qualifications of contemporary educational method and policy in the light of an age that has released new natural energies, to be used for or against mankind'. All that in ten minutes. Of course, it does not succeed. It has bitten off more than it can chew, and suffers from severe indigestion, with its accompanying wind. True, the problem with which the film deals—whether our own inventions will destroy us—is of supreme importance, but a journalistic approach to it, which is by turns slick, shallow and smug, is using the methods of the alchemist to solve problems of unclean physics. The film, in fact, does the very thing it is intended to discourage; it applies pre-atomic thought to the atomic age.

*Let's Look at Water*. 16 mm. Black and white. Sound. Running time: 20 min. Produced 1947 by the National Film Board for the Department of National Health and Welfare.

A straightforward, not very ambitious, account of how a Canadian city's water supply is purified. The opening sequence reviewing the ways in which water serves all forms of life is more than a little banal at times. That water is used for drinking and washing hardly needs to be stressed to any audience, however specialized. But when the film gets on to describing how a municipal supply is gathered, purified and distributed it does summarize with adequate clarity a number of facts that should be stored somewhere in every citizen's mind. They would perhaps remain longer in store if more reliance were placed on visual demonstration and less on the expository power of the implacable voice which is becoming a characteristic of many Canadian films.

*Klee Wyck* (Canadian Artists Series No. 5). 16 mm. Colour. Sound. Running time: 15 min. Produced 1946 by the National Film Board.

*Klee Wyck* is the name the Indians gave to the late Emily Carr, a Canadian painter who, we are told, found her inspiration 'in the towering forests and dying Indian culture of British Columbia'. In this film the camera pans up fir-trees and down totem-poles, across wooded ridges and over Indian villages. It tracks into one canvas and away from another. Seldom does the eye have a chance to rest and take in either the scenery or Miss Carr's work. The director has been faced with that most difficult of all problems, how to make a motion picture on an essentially static subject, and the peripatetic camera is his solution. But in choosing it he falls out of the frying pan of dullness into the fire of obscurity and confusion.

*Third Dimension*. 16 mm. Black and white. Sound. Running time: 19 mins. Produced 1946 by the National Film Board in co-operation with the Sculptors' Society of Canada.

This is a survey of modern Canadian sculpture. The principal sculptors of the Dominion are seen at work, and the methods they use are outlined in terms understandable to the lay observer. There is a detailed demonstration of the method of making a plaster cast from a clay original, and another of the stages by which the clay figure is built up. In fact, the emphasis is principally on the mechanical aspects of the art and there is something lifeless about the film as a result. Why, one wonders, don't the sculptors tell us something about the complexities and fascinations of working in the round, explain what they are aiming at and show how they achieve it? Surely there can't be a standing order in Ottawa that no one but the commentator shall open his trap.

*Montreal By Night*. Produced by the National Film Board in the Canada Carries On Series.

*Theme*. One of Canada's most rapidly expanding

cities at night 'in all its facets of French and English, industry and art, historic and modern'.

*Comment*. There are some strange claims (apart from the above) made in the National Film Board's information sheet about this average film: 'The film approaches Montreal at night showing that 40 per cent of the population is bilingual . . . Using the floodlights and filming places never filmed before, the picture achieves unique effects in its documenting of Montreal . . . The Canada Carries On unit of the National Film Board has made a film on upcoming Montreal, using a technique never applied in the filming of that city before.'

While it may be perfectly true that as far as Montreal is concerned some of the effects may be unique, and the technique new, merely because no other film has been made in this way about this particular city at night, it would be as well for the writers of these 'blurb sheets' to realize that this kind of film has been as competently, and often more imaginatively, made about practically every other major city in the world. Such claims can only do a disservice to the technicians who made the film—and to the film itself, since the audiences in the 60 different countries to which it is being distributed will expect something out of the ordinary.

Viewed as a modest little film about a strange city, it is pleasant enough, if uninspired; but lacks the warmth of contact with the city's inhabitants which would have been achieved by recording their voices as well as their faces. It takes us to the usual haunts of any city at night: the amusement park, the night clubs, the deserted offices and business centres cluttered up with the debris of the day, the social clubs, the suburban homes, the resting factories, the busy newspaper presses. But after all that, Montreal as Montreal remains much of a mystery nor are we much nearer to understanding what Canadians are or feel or do. Just another 'programme fill-up'.

This film shows up the limitations of 16mm., on which size it was viewed, because night photography suffers most from a bad print or mediocre projection equipment—and both are more common to sub-standard than to 35 mm. film making.

*Condition Improved*. Produced by the Canadian National Film Board for the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the Department of National Health and Welfare. 16 mm. B. and W. 33 mins.

*Theme*. The part played by various forms of occupational therapy in the treatment of injury, disease and mental illness.

*Comment*. Occupational therapy is now generally accepted as an essential adjunct to rapid recovery after accident or illness. As a comprehensive survey of the many kinds of remedial exercises used today, this film does a useful job. The treatment is simple and straightforward; but it may be questioned whether such a survey, which consists essentially of a series of linked examples, is really the most convincing approach to the subject, for in attempting to cover such a wide field details are glossed over and there is little time available for the study of individual cases. The best sequences are those dealing with the recovery of children after infantile paralysis and the treatment of stammering and neurotic conditions. In these the film really comes to life; but they are tantalizing in their brevity and each could have provided enough material for a full length film on their own.

## SURVEY OF FILMS—Summary of UNESCO's Report on Technical Needs

## NO 2—CZECHOSLOVAKIA, POLAND and YUGOSLAVIA

THE THREE countries considered in this issue now have nationalized film industries. They are also characterized by their growing documentary film production.

## Czechoslovakia

All production, distribution, import and export and exhibition of films was nationalized in August 1945. A special film department of the Ministry of Information was made responsible for launching the new State industry operating through the Czechoslovak Motion Picture Company. This company has separate sections for all types of production, distribution and exhibition, including one for research and education. The Trade Unions have a direct share in control and management.

The number of cinemas operating today is roughly the same as pre-war, though considerable expansion is planned. The present position is as follows:

	35 mm	16 mm
	cinemas	cinemas
In Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia	1,631	39
In Slovakia	245	23

The figure for weekly cinema attendances in 1946 was approximately two million.

There is considerable variety in the films shown, a far wider range of foreign films being imported and given general distribution than is customary in Britain. Percentages of all films shown from mid-1946 to mid-1947 is as follows:

	Features	Shorts
Czechoslovakia—new	4.5	37
—reissued	21	
USSR	23	25
UK	19	18
USA	18	15
France	11	5
Sweden	3	—
Switzerland and Belgium	0.5	—
Total number of films	515	340

Home production is in a relatively fortunate position. Studios are fairly extensive and well-equipped, though there is a shortage of trained technicians. Before the war between 30 and 40 feature films were produced each year. The 1946 figure was 12, but for 1947 25 films are planned and for 1948, 30. There are also a number of short film units (including one puppet film department), with an output in 1946 of 50 films. Three weekly newsreels are produced and a news magazine twice a month.

## Films in Education

The use of films in schools is being developed considerably. This is the responsibility of the Czech Cinematographic Society under the Ministry of Education, with a similar body working in Slovakia. The Society has the right to produce its own films for schools, but in 1946 only 5 were made in this way though 15 are planned for 1948. These films will be 16 mm silent. Most of the films at present used by schools are documentaries made by other sections of the industry. The Society's library contains some 125 titles, mostly re-edited German material, but it is hoped to extend its range by exchange arrangements with Switzerland, England, America and

Sweden. In the country's 17,000 primary and secondary schools there are some 2,000 projectors (as against 300 pre-war) but only 50 of these are sound. The Czechoslovak Film Institute also plays an important part in the educational field. It has a library of film classics and is responsible for the improvement of technical standards in production and exhibition, and for the training of technicians. Training facilities are well advanced. In conjunction with the Academy of Dramatic Arts, the Institute provides full courses for all grades of technicians and artists.

tion cinema facilities and cinema going are by no means highly developed.

It has been estimated that 180 feature films a year are required. In 1945-46 Poland imported from:

USSR	...	40 films
France	...	43 "
Sweden	...	10 "
Switzerland	...	2 "
USA	...	a few

In 1947 contracts were concluded for 40 British films, 65 American and some French. Poland also imports now from Czechoslovakia and Italy.

Production facilities are very limited, much equipment was destroyed. Although only two feature films have been completed, 150 news reels and long documentaries and 50 short documentaries were made by June 1947.

## Educational Films

Educational films are the concern of the Polish Film Institute which is responsible for production, distribution, research, film societies, and the training of technicians. The Institute has two studios and has produced films on a wide range of subjects. A Scientific Film Institute has also been established. There are 500 16 mm silent and 10-20 sound projectors available for school use on a travelling basis; only a few schools have their own machines. The Institute's Central Film Library contains 250 titles, the majority silent. Special series of shows are also arranged for adult audiences.

Despite the initiative being shown in all fields, Poland is still gravely handicapped by the losses it has suffered. The shortage of equipment and trained technicians is acute.

## Yugoslavia

Before the war there was practically no film industry in the country. Cinema going and the use of films for other purposes had hardly been developed. The new Government has set about remedying the deficiency. A central Cinema Commission has been created, to work with similar commissions in each of the six federated republics. Its primary function is to build studios and develop production, and to expand the number of cinemas and mobile projection units. At present there are only 120 to 150 small cinemas, poorly equipped. Weekly attendance is just over half a million. Of the films shown in 1947 75-85 per cent were Russian, 10-15 per cent French, with one Yugoslav film. An agreement has also been concluded for a number of films from Czechoslovakia. In general the country is relying therefore on Eastern Europe for its programmes. Home production has hardly got under way. Apart from newsreels a few documentary films have been made so far, though future plans are ambitious.

## Educational Films

Educational film use is undeveloped for the same reasons. 5 films are, however, scheduled for production this year, and a special educational film studio is planned. 300 projectors are available. There is therefore a great need for equipment of all kinds and for contact with educational film activities in other countries.

## Poland

All branches of the film industry in Poland were also nationalized in 1945. A State enterprise, Film Polski, is the responsible agency supervising all activities including research, training, and educational films which are the business of the Polish Film Institute. Production is the only field open to private undertakings which can hire the nationalized studios.

Before the war Poland had some 800 cinemas, but most of these were destroyed. Today 560 are in operation with a seating capacity of 230,000. Present weekly attendances are in the neighbourhood of half a million. For the size of the popula-

## Recording Angel?

### A CLOSE-UP OF KEN CAMERON

The Story by Alex Shaw

AH JEHAN lavished every care on the building of the Taj Mahal. He sought perfection. Another seeker after the same quality is building his dream place in an isolated corner of the Crown Film Unit Studios at Beaconsfield. Locally known, affectionately or derisively, according to the feelings of the speaker, as Cameron Castle, it is one day to be the hub of an eventual Palace of Perfect Sound. Indeed, were it not for the Ministry of Works, there is no doubt that its designer also could have insisted on porphyry, alabaster andapis lazuli being used in the construction (always provided, of course, that they were acoustically suitable).

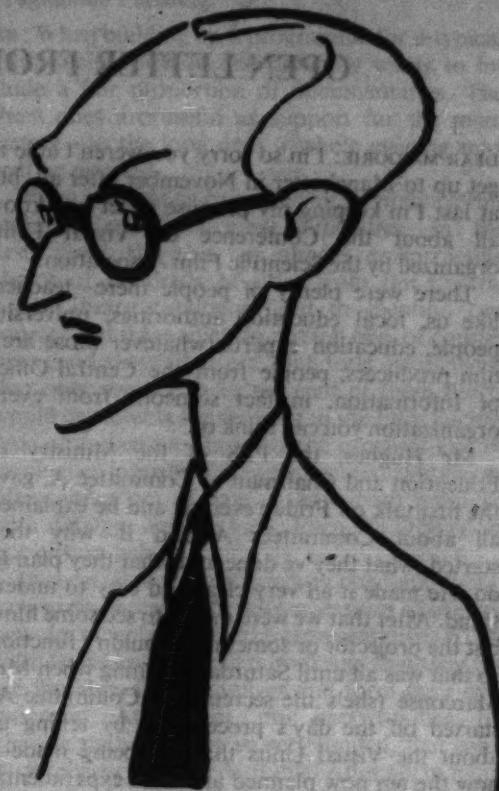
This building represents the latest step in Ken Cameron's efforts to record better and better sound, an ideal which he has fanatically pursued ever since he started in films.

Sound and music are his masters and seldom has there been a more willing slave. Presumably he takes in food (although it is possible that this, in his case, is done via the ear and that the nourishment is sound waves). And there would not seem to be much time for sleep in a spare time devoted to concerts and the esoteric literature of sound recording. In any case, sleep for him is not the waste of time it is with lesser mortals; he can sleep in his sleep as I have many times proved, sleeping peacefully at concerts or the opera he will yet, on waking, comment sourly that the notes were a bit rough in the slow movement or that a singer was off-key. And lo and behold, they were! The fact that he strenuously denies having slept at all is nothing to do with the case. I have witnesses.

Not content with listening and then trying to reproduce the perfect sound, he takes a passionate interest in musicians and will talk of a Walton, Britten, Alwyn or Abady with a critical enthusiasm usually reserved for football teams. In fact that is what they probably are to him, for in his mind there seems to be something very much akin to the football divisions up and down which the composers move according to their latest works. Players he is not so interested in, I think he feels that they stand between him and that perfect sound he is always seeking, yet, in spite of this, few of us who lived through the terrible day when the signed photograph of Dame Myra Hess fell from his office wall will ever believe that he is quite blind to their talents. No ominous geese ever created such a feeling of impending doom.

He often appears to be a forecast of the Man of the Future; highly specialized, obsessed, an Ear-Man. Certainly a list of the films which he has recorded—*Coastal Command*, *Target*, *Listen to Britain*, *V.I.* and *Instruments of the Orchestra* among them—suggests a vast range of sounds hunted, caught, dissected and put on celluloid. But his passion for American stage musicals shows that the man is still human. Anybody who can fly from Ottawa to New York for a few hours specially to see *Allegro*, is clearly an endearing character.

Ken comes from the fanatic-producing city of Glasgow. While studying to be an electrical engineer he spent his spare time at the movies and particularly those shown by the Glasgow Film Society. Here he heard Grierson and the inevitable



The Drawing by M.A.

spell was cast over him. From that day forward he determined to be a sound recordist. He spent the next summer as an apprentice at the GPO Blackheath (ten shillings a week) and then joined the unit as what he himself calls a sound stooge (eighteen shillings and ninepence a week). Those were the days of *The Fairy of the Phone* and *Bill Blewett*. Ken did a lot of stooging. Then came that strange hiatus repeated in so many of our lives when he went and stooged on quota quickies at Welwyn instead. Cavalcanti recalled him to the GPO and finally, a BSC safely under his hat, he did his first day's work as a fully fledged sound recordist in Manchester with the Halle doing a score of Gaillard's for *Forty Million People*. From then on it was a pursuit of better sound. With frequency and modulation, decibel and supersonic, by mike and by cycle, through trial and through tears, he sought perfection. The human voice, the orchestra, the natural sound, these were his raw materials. Their impeccable reproduction, his aim.

An enthusiast himself he is a connoisseur of other enthusiasts. Thus the stormy collaboration between himself and Muir Mathieson has been more than usually fruitful. Each sees in the other a fellow-maniac and together they have done much for our films.

Now, at the almost tender age of 31 (he has been described as 'the oldest thirty-one in the world') he finds new enthusiasms. The National Film Board of Canada has found in him an ardent gospeller; bigger and better scoring stages are planned; new materials are to be used for walls and ceilings; stereophonic sound is in the offing. Where it will all end is a matter for conjecture. Will he go mad trying to record the unbearable or will he find new worlds to conquer? I think I shall telephone him and ask him if he can get on the track, the squeak of a bat or the noise of the stars, for the new, the difficult, the impossible, is his joy. Documentary owes much to this pioneering attitude of his.

### BOOK REVIEW

*We Made a Film in Cyprus*. By Laurie Lee and Ralph Keene (Longmans, Green and Co, London—New York—Toronto, 12s. 6d.)

FOR THE undoubtedly vast body of people interested in how films are made, this book should have considerable appeal. It is conceivable, however, that the discriminating reader of travel books will find it even more absorbing. The film fan will look for rather more technical detail than is provided by Ralph Keene in his half of the text, but no-one could call for a livelier portrait of Cyprus and its people than sparkles from the pen of Laurie Lee. Lee was the script writer for *Cyprus is an Island*, and he is less concerned to reveal the processes of cinematic gestation than to provide us with a visually exciting picture of modern Cyprus. Sometimes his indefatigable search for the dramatically evocative word or the unexpected visual analogy leads to over-rich writing but the volume is slim and the problem of digestion not, therefore, acute. The illustrations are lovely and generally to the point of the text, and most readers will be interested in the film's scenario which is printed as an appendix.

We should do well perhaps to prepare for a spate of such books (scratch a documentary film-maker and you will find a literary man) and future practitioners would do well to study this rather fine example of what may prove to be a much misused genre. They will observe that one problem remains unsolved. Should the book be intimately done, written about the film-makers in their spark-striking relationship with their actors, or should it be a travel book about the place? Can it be both, as is here attempted? It is significant that the whole book comes suddenly and brilliantly to life when Laurie Lee writes about the film-makers' Easter Day party with their Cyprian hosts. Here is something of the necessarily picaresque quality of such documentary film-making.

And, finally, what are we to make of Laurie Lee's penultimate words? 'I thought of the film we had prepared, which was now ready to be made; but I thought more of that film we could never make, of the things that could not be said.'

Heaven help us if film-makers start to come back with their real achievements in their books and not in their films.

## OPEN LETTER FROM A SCHOOLTEACHER

DEAR MARJORIE: I'm so sorry you weren't able to get up to Manchester in November after all, but at last I'm keeping my promise to let you know all about the Conference on Visual Units organized by the Scientific Film Association.

There were plenty of people there—teachers like us, local education authorities, university people, education experts (whatever those are), film producers, people from the Central Office of Information, in fact someone from every organization you can think of.

Mr Hughes, the PPS of the Ministry of Education and Chairman of Committee A, gave the first talk on Friday evening and he explained all about Committees A and B—why they started, what they've done and what they plan to do. He made it all very clear and easy to understand. After that we were meant to see some films but the projector or something wouldn't function so that was all until Saturday morning when Mrs Marcousé (she's the secretary of Committee A) started off the day's proceedings by telling us about the Visual Units that are being made—how the ten now planned are to be experimental and go out to selected LEAs so as to see how they work in different schools. She named and outlined all the Units and then showed us the main film of *Houses in History* (it also has wall charts and models which we saw). Later on someone in the discussion said that it wasn't a subject which was really suitable for a film and I must say I didn't

like it very much—I wouldn't use it because I think my children would find it hard to follow and a bit dull.

Next came the *Water Supply* Unit which hadn't yet been approved by the Ministry of Education but which should be out soon after you get this letter. It was meant for 12–14 year children (on the average) and included one main film, 11 silent ones, 2 film strips, wall charts and teacher's notes. We saw the main film—(I'm afraid it would make the children in your area laugh a bit because it didn't even mention all the houses in the country which depend solely on individual rain-water storage tanks for their supply!) However it was a new approach and I think it could be very useful in the schools. There were a lot of criticisms afterwards but I approved of its clarity and its slow commentary—not a word too much. People seemed to think it was rather like a 'mystery tour'—that they ought to have shown where the water went before they showed it leaving the river; others thought that the diagrams were too involved for children, that they were not simple enough and did not give any ideas of proportion in size of pumphouses and tanks, and that the children would ask 'why' over a lot of points which should have been clear.

After this we saw some of the silent films of the Unit—I don't think the ones showing how various pumps worked were much use and two other people said it was waste of time to make them.

Then we saw the film-strips—I liked them, though later on one of the film people said they were badly made. I still feel they'd be popular with my class. The charts weren't so good—most of them seemed more for older children and the simple ones were rather dull—I'd rather allow the class to make their own from the rest of the material.

That afternoon all the people who had been involved in the making of the Unit described what had happened from the first idea in March, 1945, until now. It does seem awful waste of time, money and energy to take three years over one Unit, doesn't it? And someone said it had cost £16,000! The COI man said he thought £8,000 would be nearer but he wasn't sure. It was quite interesting to hear about all the work, but I did feel it was a lot of fuss over something which will admittedly be very useful, but not all that essential. Still, it is an experiment and the people who made the Unit seem to think it is going to be successful. The delegates were full of questions and criticism but didn't get very clear answers.

In the evening we saw another Unit meant to be used by the students in training colleges, etc., themselves and not for teaching as such. *New Home* was the name of the main film; I thought it was very good and only wish I had the time to get my class going on something like that. I didn't quite get the point of the ciné-panorama but the silent film was excellent. In fact, I liked this unit *Local Studies*, best of all and think it should go down very well in the training colleges and with older children. It will be useful because of the lack of 'teaching' in it.

Next morning we saw the films we should have seen on Friday and then Mr Thom (Secretary of Committee B) talked about the work of his Committee. He told all about the panels who are working on films for different age groups and then said that every film was to have an Educational Adviser a teacher of the appropriate age group who would be seconded on full pay for a term or longer in order to be in on all the film making and learn a bit about the technicalities—that would be fun to do, wouldn't it? He also mentioned apparatus supply and the Regional Film Libraries which are to be set up so that we can go to see films and Visual Units before actually ordering them for use. That seems a good idea! Again, there was a hot discussion and people aired quite a lot of grievances about the length of time taken on making Units, about difficulties over apparatus, about bad co-operation from LEAs and about the weak points in the films. Unfortunately the Committee people didn't seem really to answer all the questions we asked for lack of time, I suppose.

That afternoon we heard Mr Green on the need for research in Visual Education. I felt that he was obsessed by psychological experiments and some of the ones he quoted seemed quite irrelevant. Also, he seemed very exercised over whether children learned best visually or otherwise—I thought the only people who could learn wholly visually were the deaf-and-dumb and after all, we were discussing Visual Aids in Education, not Visual Teaching.

Anyhow, the Conference was worth going to and I wish you had been able to get there. I do imagine I'd ever have the time or the wish to use a whole Visual Unit but I suppose someone might have. Anyhow, it does show that the powers-that-be are trying to do something and it's very interesting to see how they do it!

Yours sincerely,

## MERLIN FILMS

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## CORRESPONDENCE

In the article reprinted in your last issue concerning the making of our film *A Stitch in Time*, the subject of industrial exteriosis, Philip Mackie claims that his history 'is untypical in one particular only, everything went smoothly'. Apart from this evidence of a short memory, there are in his lively account a number of statements which seem to us to call for comment. In what follows, the figures correspond with the numbering of his paragraphs.

In paragraph (4) he says 'The PCO... rings Hector Bathos, and finds that he is free'. It is of course, true that our producer frequently carries out personally investigations and the writing of treatments undertaken by this Company, particularly in the fishing season. It was presumably, during one of his absences that Mackie's telephone conversation with Bathos took place.

In paragraph (5) there are two points. 'The fishing meeting is attended by the PCO, Bathos, Public Relations Officer at the Ministry of Health, and the experts on exteriosis'. The producer, we believe, was still fishing.

After the meeting, Bathos and the PCO have drink together... This interested us and we asked Bathos about it. He reassured us—he said paid.

In paragraph (6) we find, 'Production Contracts then send a formal commissioning letter for a two-reel treatment at a fee of £65' to Nadir Films. Mr Mackie's account suggests that no answer to this letter was ever sent. Our files show that, in fact, our Business Manager protested at once that the fee was too high. Also, the subject required considerable investigation involving some three or four months of Bathos's time, accommodation and transport. For this, in reply, Production Contracts offered the sum of £5. A lengthy exchange of letters followed which became more and more pained as it developed. In order to settle differences of this kind our Business Manager sometimes even has to put on his bowler hat, take his umbrella and make a personal visit to Norgeby House. This upsets him very much as it interrupts his football pools.

Paragraph (7) says, 'The Treasury, after some thought, give their authority.' We regard this as a statement of considerable importance. The use of the words 'after some thought' puts Treasury officials at a much higher ethnographic level than had imagined.

Paragraph (8): 'Hector Bathos sends in his treatment.' An unusually definite step for Bathos have taken, but doubtless he was tired of waiting for the producer to get back.

Paragraph (10): 'The PCO gets Nadir Films commissioned for a shooting script, *in the same way as they were commissioned for a treatment*' (our italics). This time our Business Manager, we are told, merely reached for his bowler hat and umbrella and started for Norgeby House right away. The umbrella, it appears, makes admirable camouflage for the smaller types of sub-machine gun.

Paragraph (12): 'Nadir Films send in a budget for... £3,950', etc. This implies that, owing the global to be £4,000, we adjusted our budget to fall just nicely short of it. This does not add up with the facts. Our budget figure was £341 which was submitted knowing that a mar-

gin is always advisable so as Production Contracts can cut out a couple of items to make them feel good without putting the production in jeopardy. As Mackie points out, the figure was duly reduced by cutting out certain sums, including the firm's telephone bill which had unaccountably become mixed up with our Business Manager's papers, to £3,895. Subsequently, supplementary budgets brought the final maximum contract price up to £6,340. It may be of interest that the firm's telephone bill has been paid.

Paragraph (13): 'As a result of their comments, the whole of the first sequence is cut out and replaced by a single close-up of exteriosis in action.' Doubtless, poor Bathos, tired out by being in there all alone, pinch-hitting for the producer, let this one slip by in an unguarded moment.

Arising from paragraph (17), we have heard recently that the film has had a great success in the regions as a comedy fill-up, but at shows to factory workers no effect whatsoever is apparent.

You may, of course, use this letter in any way you think fit.

Yours faithfully,  
for and on behalf of NADIR FILMS LTD,  
NERO NONFLAM,  
Managing Director

P.S. It was discovered that the producer had gone into features.

## Programme Planning

SIR: When building up a programme for a typical Film Society session one naturally wants to include a fair proportion of documentaries. The short ones are useful as support for the main feature—to the long ones a whole evening may well be devoted.

When it comes to carrying out in practice this inclusion one finds great difficulties. In the first place there is an almost embarrassing choice of hundreds of titles from the Central Film Library catalogue (just to mention one source) and these titles do not tell one, of course, how good these films are. One feels instinctively that only some 5 to 10 per cent of these shorts would be suitable for showing to the Film Society type of audiences. Secondly the excellent graded catalogues prepared by various organizations are often either out of date or have been prepared with different aims in view. Even the DNL does not always help.

In short, there is only one way out—and that is to organize occasional viewing sessions of selected new documentaries for the representatives of the Film Societies and similar bodies so that they can see the films for themselves and form their own judgment. At present, the opportunities for viewing such films are so very limited, that some such scheme is surely desirable. After all, in many towns (and perhaps in many parts of London, too) it is only the Film Societies that will give the documentaries a fair chance and fight for their appreciation.

Yours, etc.,  
Chelmsford

LUCIAN PRECHNER

## ANNOUNCING

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## CORRESPONDENCE

(cont.)

### Manchester Conference

SIR: I do not wish to cause affront to the organizers of the very valuable recent conference concerned with Visual Aids in Education. Such people put an immense amount of skill and hard work into the voluntary promotion of an admirable cause and they deserve all the help and encouragement we can give. I hope, therefore, that they will understand that I am trying to be constructive when I point out that most of their strenuous efforts will be wasted if they do not give their attention to the matter of adequate presentation of the material discussed.

This applies to the planning of such conferences as a whole and its psychological effect upon the audience, but much more so to the projection of films and stills.

The present difficulties of equipment, staff and organization are well known—but there is no excuse for thoroughly bad projection even if some of it is provided by the COI. It has been said that such methods are typical of the modern classroom conditions. If so, that is merely an indication that teachers need a little training in the technique—but in any case it cannot constitute an excuse for dragging down an organized display to such a level especially when it is intended as an example and a lead.

Even if adequate projectors and screens are unobtainable (and are they?) there is no excuse for projecting the film back to front, end first, off the screen or right out of focus. Surely the projectionist should be allowed and should take time beforehand to have the whole 16mm. outfit ready for instant projection in an adequate manner. If he were given such time to prepare and adequate instructions, he could also splice the short reels together to avoid those infuriating pauses for rethreading.

The climax was reached at the SFA Manchester Conference when a complete film show was cancelled (after about 20 false starts) because 'the films were green'. If one cannot project a green film how does any film ever get shown? No, any projector which causes such havoc should be serviced or scrapped—and sometimes those responsible for its use might be treated similarly. Meanwhile could somebody read and act upon the admirable SFA leaflet on *How to Run a Film Show?*

Yours, etc.,

GEORGE A. JONES

### Film Societies

SIR: I was indeed pleased to see your article on Page 1 of this month's *DNL*. An experience of mine two years ago with MGM indicates to me the source of the suggestion made by KRS that Film Societies are 'breeding grounds for leaders of anti-film attacks'.

I had occasion to write regarding 16mm films they might have. Their reply was that I call and see Mr Russell-Roberts. I called and was astonished to learn that it was the first they had heard of Film Societies; even the great Sam Eckman appeared ignorant of our existence. He said they had no such thing in America. I recounted how we in our Society handled films. We discussed the sociological content and honesty of

films whether they be documentaries or feature films. I was then shown a list of MGM films which they contemplated reducing to 16mm and asked if I considered any would be suitable for Film Societies. I picked out two which I thought might be used. They were *The Citadel* and *Mr Deeds* I chose them because of the possibility of rousing lively discussion on their sociological honesty of content. Asked why I had chosen none of the others, I openly said I considered them rubbish, unworthy of honest straightforward discussion. In other words they were pure escapism. I emphasized at great length that we were not an alternative to cinemas. Our job was to make our members more discriminating. I asked them to give us documentaries of America equal to British documentaries. If they were worthy my members would express their appreciation in no uncertain manner. This closed the interview, every word of which was taken down in shorthand!

Since then I have received some very charming letters from Mr Russell-Roberts inviting my custom.

I strongly suspect that the KRS have been unconsciously led up the garden by MGM arising out of my interview. I am therefore most anxious to learn the answers to your two questions. I hope you will publish them—if they do reply!

Yours, etc.,

H. E. NORRIS

West London Co-operative Film Society

DEAR SIR: I cannot understand the lapse of editorial good taste which permitted your column to be used recently by Mr Eric Leslie for a particularly vicious and quite uncalled for attack on the defeated German people.

If it really is necessary to rail against 'U Bosch', two years after the war and in the mid of a desperate world-wide bid for peace, DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER, a specialist journal, surely not the proper medium. I doubt whether any part of the film industry is in fact really appropriate as the spearhead of such an attack, for no thinking person will deny the contribution of the Germans to the screen whatever else they may have done to earn humanity's displeasure.

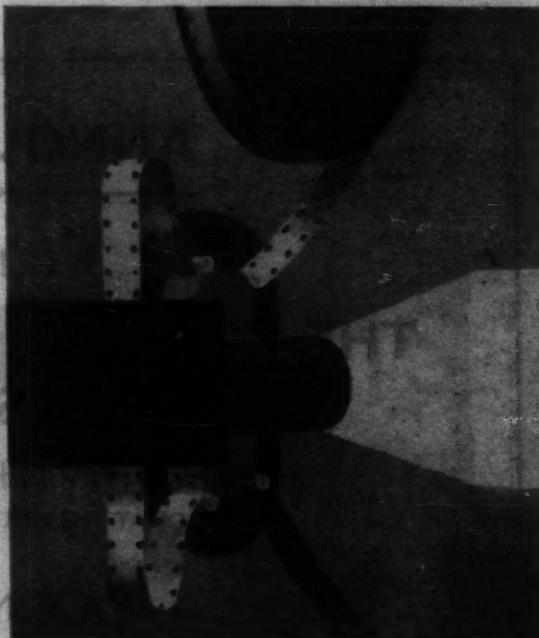
In any case, judged by our own British standards Mr Leslie's behaviour is quite inexcusable. He pounces foaming on your German contributor for the crime, mark you, of having expressed an honest opinion publicly. What would Mr Leslie say if the German scientists now working (and, incidentally, getting killed) over here the interests of this country were to decide, in consequence of reading his remarks, that they too had better keep their finds to themselves?

No, stick to your subject, Mr Editor . . . and leave Mr Leslie to do his mischief, if he must elsewhere.

Yours faithfully,

GEOFFREY DAND

17 Iverna Gardens, Kensington, London, W8  
November 27th, 1947



## CINEMA

CREDIT for the actual invention of the cinematograph is difficult to apportion. It is certain that Englishmen played an important part. As long ago as 1860 Sir John Herschel published a theory of cinematography, and about 1889 a patent for a cinema camera and projector was applied for by W. Friese Greene and M. Evans. Today the cinema is our great relaxation. But how many of us who go to "the movies", who watch the late performance of our particular "star", realise what the cinematograph industry owes to the workers in many branches of science and technology, and not least to the chemist? No other form of entertainment owes him so heavy a debt. Celluloid itself, the basis of the industry, is a chemical achievement. This must be transparent to give clear images after great magnification, resilient and tough to stand great strain. It must be so treated that the danger from fire is reduced to a minimum. The hand of the chemist is indeed traceable from the make-up of the actors to the lamps in the projectors. In the apparatus used for the sound recording rare metals are needed: in the lenses of cameras and projectors, optical glass of the highest quality: in the colour-photography, pigments of the truest and most vivid colour. The sets for the ballrooms and palaces of the cinema's Cloudbuckodom involve the use of large quantities of paints, quick-drying stucco and plasters: the costumes and draperies must be dyed. The tale is continued into the cinema theatre itself, in its decoration, its disinfection, its air-conditioning. When next you sit in your favourite cinema, think for a moment of the patient work in laboratory and factory that has enabled you to see the wonders of the world or the finest product of the cinematograph studio so clearly and still at so modest a price.



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